

their own position in England attacked by the most formidable antagonist that Oxford, that Europe, could supply. The chiefs of the Four Orders rallied to the defence of all Church institutions by Canon law established.

It was a rally ; it was to some degree a change of policy. Strange as it may seem, the friars had been the early allies and friends of Wycliffe. Still in fiction, as formerly in fact, they were beggars, who were to hold no property; they were to depend on the voluntary system in its most exaggerated form ; they were to live on the food which from day to day was given them by pious friends. Francis of Assisi had actually obeyed that hardest of all commands, ' Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor.' His early disciples obeyed it as readily as their founder. But times had changed. The friars now lived *in* great palaces where treasure lay stored, yet even in those magnificent halls the old idea that to be poor was blessed still held its place in theory. Evangelical poverty, the poverty that was recommended in the Gospel and practised by Christ and His Apostles, was the basis on which the friars still presumed to condemn the wealth of the Bishops and monks. Great controversies had raged round the question within the pale of the four orders. One section, known as the ' Spiritual' Franciscans, had been persecuted by order of the Pope for holding the theory. These men, as a Wyclifite writer declared, were still in existence, and still subjected to persecution by their more worldly brethren.¹ It is certain that a tendency to the theory of evangelical poverty existed among the orders, if it did not prevail there. Their attitude upon the question was still debated at their councils, but the decisions were indefinite and confusing.² They still declared, it seems, that what they took from the pious was only by way of alms, and that all which they thus accumulated belonged not to themselves, but to the Pope. Money, the accursed thing, they would only touch with gloves on their hands.³ Such affectations made no difference to their real wealth, which daily increased in proportion to their influence. But it enabled them to

¹ Matt., 51, **line 10.**

» *De Apostasid*, 23.

* Matt., 49 ; *PoL Poems*, ii. 28 Pecock's *Bepressor*, ii. 543.